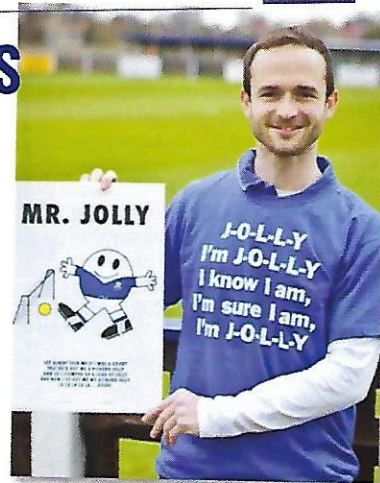


When I signed from Hayes the club agreed a goal bonus.. I don't think Gordon would have said yes if he'd known how many I was going to get!



FORMER Stones director Roge sent a few questions to our ace ex-striker Jolls - and his answers were remarkably candid. So much so that we're going to have to run this article in two parts....

Married / relationship / any children / pets / hobbies?

I'm married and now proud Dad to my son James who was born in January this year!

What's the day job? I work for Royal Holloway, University of London as Head of Payroll and Pensions. In a nutshell I'm responsible for millions of pounds each month in salaries and tax and managing the organisations two pension funds.

When you first signed for Wealdstone in 2003 (really!!) you came in if memory serves from Hayes, joining a side that already featured Mick Swaysland, Marvin Morgan, Jermaine Beckford and Ben Alexander as forwards. Were you confident you'd get a run in the side and displace one of those?

If I remember rightly, when I signed the club were near the top of the league. Because of that I knew that I couldn't expect to go

BY ROGER SLATER



straight into the team and that I'd have to wait for my chance. Unfortunately for the club but fortunately for me, the team couldn't buy a win so I became a starter sooner than I expected. I didn't exactly turn the fortunes around but I was scoring even though we were losing and fell away in the title race.

When I arrived Mick Swaysland and Marvin Morgan were the forwards but they were quite similar in build. So I was bought in to play alongside either of them as the good old 'big man little man' combo.

The following season Marvin and I formed a really good partnership. It wasn't until both Mick and Marvin had moved on that Jermaine came through to the first team after being sent out on loan elsewhere. On the pitch we just clicked straight away.

Who or what else sold you on the club? I remember Gordon Bartlett coming to my house and we had a good honest chat over a cup of tea. Gordon had bought round the blueprints for the new stadium development, Prince Edward Playing Fields and told me that this was where the club

would be playing in about 2 years time. Obviously in time those plans didn't come to fruition but, credit to Gordon's sales skills, it was a great pitch he gave me. I told him that I remember going down to Northwood FC in 1997 (I think) with my brother and watching the last game of the season where Wealdstone won promotion and seeing the fans going mad and running on the pitch at the end of the game. He told me that the fans were still mad but importantly they were passionate, turning up in numbers and even travelling to away games, which was unheard of for a non-league club.

I also really appreciated the fact that the club were willing to pay a fee for me which showed me that Gordon had seen something in me and that the then chairman Nick Symmons backed him to bring me in.

The Club had already agreed the £1,000 fee with Hayes so I agreed there and then for £60-a-week (which was more than half my contract at Hayes) with a £10 win and goal bonus, with goals increasing by £10 after every 10 goals. I don't think Gordon was counting on me scoring so many otherwise that incentive wouldn't have been put in there!

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As a young player, when you look back on those days is there a smile on your face? Any regrets or highlights?

Looking back on those days there is a huge smile on my face, especially the first few years when we played our games at Edgware FC. I have to say that this period, and my time at Heybridge Swifts, were the most enjoyable of my non-league career.

When I first signed at Wealdstone there was a great bunch of lads, Robin Tucker, Martin Carter, Andy Carter, Marvin Morgan, Rob Courtnage, Mick Swaysland to name a few. It was such a good team to play in and what made it even better was the social side. After training and games the majority of players, and Gordon, Leo, Fred Cummings and Tony Kelly, all used to head down the White Lion pub on the main road (as we didn't want to give our money to the bar at Edgware FC), discuss the game for 10 minutes and then have a few beers, win or lose.

Highlights, I used to love playing our home games at Edgware FC. The pitch and the changing rooms were horrific but the atmosphere during games used to be amazing. The stands used to be close to the pitch and although there were only a few hundred fans it seemed like many more. A game that stands out for me was an FA Trophy game against Thurrock on a Friday night. We scored a late winner and the 'Kennel' stand went absolutely berserk.

Obviously the Play-Off at Dulwich was an indescribable moment - more of that later.

Regrets? Did you have a few? It was a fairly young squad with a few 'old heads' adding experience - who and what were the influences on your game and development then?

In that team we used to have some big characters and Gordon



Richard Jolly (10) nets one of a hat-trick in a game for Sutton against Maidstone United in 2010-11 season.. the year he came on loan to the Stones and netted 10 goals in a month!

always allowed us to play attacking football. He'd also let us have our say in the changing room and dig each other out if someone wasn't pulling their weight. There used to be loads of arguments during and after games but we all knew that it was because we all wanted to win and we used to sort it out and then have a beer afterwards.

I used to love the social side, you got to know your teammates and it made a big difference on the pitch. Managers like Gordon, Brian Statham (Heybridge) and Paul Doswell (Sutton) used to embrace and promote the social side of things and it showed as players in those teams really played for each other and the manager.

Unfortunately that's now changed in the game, and I've seen this first hand. In some teams I've been in not everyone would get involved, some didn't want to socialise, some kept themselves to themselves and didn't integrate so you didn't get to know their character which made it difficult to speak your mind honestly without fear of upsetting people.

It's a shame because I really enjoyed how football used to be but I suppose society has changed, people are more sensitive now.

Even in non league, I think my time straddled the good old fashioned 'turn up, play football, have a beer' mentality to the now more professional outlook of proper training, diet and fitness.

Personally I liked the old school ways. I'd built a solid partnership with Marvin Morgan before he moved on, then with Jermaine over the following season before we both moved on - different styles but in goals alone very productive even in a relatively poor side.

What were they like to play with? Did either impact your game and style? Marvin and Jermaine were great to play with, albeit incredibly frustrating at times! They would try something ridiculous instead of playing an easy pass and it would aggravate people but that one time when it did come off, it was brilliant. Both were similar in stature and athletic ability and had that touch of flair and genius about them. Marvin was a good lad and he would get involved with all the games and jokes in the changing room whereas Jermaine used to be quiet and keep to himself. Each game Jermaine and I used to have a competition of how

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many goals, nutmegs and step-overs we could do, tally the scores up and the loser would buy the other a beer in the bar after. Needless to say I lost due to the ridiculous amount of step-overs Jermaine used to perform but I very rarely got him a beer because he never went in the bar after the game. But if I did win I made sure I got my beer from him!

One of the highlights must be the Dulwich Play-off. After a long season how did you feel before, during and after that game?

Although it was such a big moment, and one that has gone down in the club's history, in reality, we didn't even win a trophy for it! With the league restructure, we finished sixth and had to win the game to literally stay in the same league. But irrespective of that, looking back, it was such a big moment for the club, had it resulted in failure then who knows where the club would be now.

I remember it being on a Monday night and due to the London traffic I turned up about 20 minutes late to the ground. Martin Carter scored early in the first half and we were playing some really good football but we sat off and Dulwich took control and started to terrorise us and they went in the lead. When Dave Ryan scored a free kick to bring us

back level it knocked the wind out of their sails and gave us the belief that we could go on and win it.

That didn't happen and it went to penalties. Straight away I told Gordon I wanted the fifth penalty. As you know, I'm not renowned for my penalty taking prowess, so I thought that by taking the fifth, if the earlier penalties were horrific we'd have lost and I wouldn't be required or on the flip side, I would take all the glory by scoring the winner!

During the penalty shoot-out I remember looking at all the Wealdstone fans behind the goal and trying to pick out my brother and my Dad, then at the Dulwich players kit and thinking 'Who would choose to put pink and brown quadrants on a kit?'

Next thing I know, I'm the next man up and if I'm honest I didn't know the score.

Our centre half Danny Butler then shouts out



Happy days... Jolls in Stones shirt

behind me 'Win it for us Jolls'. Wow, my palms went instantly sweaty and I was trying to think what I was going to do. I normally always went low to my left but I remembered I had missed my last 2 penalties so going left wasn't looking so appealing. I still didn't know what I was going to do when I got to the penalty spot and placed the ball down. To make things worse the ball wouldn't sit properly on the spot and kept rolling away. I've watched this back on the DVD and it only took 3 seconds to place the ball properly but it felt like minutes at the time.

I walked back from the ball and looked at the goalkeeper, still no decision made. The ref blew his whistle and it was only at that moment that I made the decision to go high and to the right.....

Keeper went the right way, my bum squeaked a bit, but the ball missed him by centimetres and into the net to my huge relief!

CONTINUED IN NEXT HOME PROGRAMME..

I wish I'd broken George Duck's scoring record at the Stones, but I'm proud of what I achieved for the club.. and the fans



Continuing the reminiscences of our ace ex-striker Jolls... who had just got to the point where he'd put away the winning spot-kick in the promotion-winning penalty shoot-out at Dulwich in 2004.... (questions from ROGER SLATER)

REMEMBER running to the left of the goal to where the majority of the Wealdstone fans were, puffing my chest out and spreading my arms wide to make it look I had been cool as a cucumber and that it was never in doubt that I'd score. Cue pandemonium from the fans!

It felt like we were on the pitch celebrating with the fans for ages after the game. Grown men had tears in their eyes and one was even doing knee slides and roly-polys on the pitch (Pete don't think I didn't see you!) Gordon said to me 'I told you when I signed you these fans are mad!'

Back in the changing room everyone was buzzing. We went into Dulwich's bar and had a few beers and wanted to head out to carry on the celebrations but we had forgotten it was a week night... Everyone went off home and an hour later I was in bed with my alarm set for 6am for work the next day! That burst the bubble a little!

It wasn't until I saw a picture in the Harrow Observer a few days later of Gordon and I that I realised my eyes had tears in them! Who knew I'd get so emotional about

finishing seventh!

A season or so later and some people were surprised at the time by your move to Heybridge Swifts, perhaps feeling that you could have made more of a step up (as you eventually did)?

I've always been honest about this and the main reason I went to Heybridge Swifts was the money. I didn't even know where Heybridge was!

I wasn't particularly happy with how things were developing at Wealdstone. I thought we had lost our way a bit following our move to Northwood and there had been some big changes that had occurred to both the coaching staff and playing staff which I didn't think moved things forward.

And I was a bit despondent that no pro club had come in for me. I had seen players like Scott Fitzgerald and DJ Campbell go from non-league into the pro game and I had matched them with my goals but no one had come calling. So at that point I began to look at how I could make as much money as I could from non-league football, as mercenary as that sounds.

Heybridge Swifts had a wealthy businessman owner and an equally wealthy manager and were sitting in 2nd in the league with a real chance of winning the title. They offered Wealdstone £2,000 for me, quadrupled my weekly wage, gave me £50 a goal and £50 a win plus threw in a free car to drive to Essex and back for games and training. Plus they would sometimes put me in a hotel on a Friday night before a game if I didn't want to

INSIDE STORY: JOLLS CONTD

drive early on the Saturday morning. I've had countless calls from clubs at the time from Conference South, Conference National even a few in League 2 and one in League 1. When you speak to them they always say the same thing, 'You've not played at this level before', 'it's a big step up', 'we'll let you live your dream'. Then they'd offer peanuts, less than my non-league wages.

I appreciated the calls and if I was younger I may have taken one of the offers. But I had a mortgage and bills to pay so I always used to tell them that it would have to be in my financial interest to quit my stable, well-paid day job as well as my non-league wages, to play football for a few years with no guaranteed long term future. I would then give them a figure of what I would be looking which used to end the conversation.

One opportunity I would have loved to have taken was that of going to Hong Kong for a year and playing in their top league for a team called Sun Hei Sports Club. This came about a few months before my move to Heybridge via former Wealdstone team mate Gary McKeown. He had played in Hong Kong and had contacts there. Wages, flights and accommodation had all been agreed but as I was under contract with Wealdstone they weren't prepared to pay so the move fell through, which was disappointing.

You've played for a number of managers across your career, some with good relationships and good results, others less so. What makes a good manager for Richard Jolly?

A good manager for me? Someone who trusts me, believes in me, talks to me and listens to my opinion. They don't have to agree with me nor I agree with them, but I think that shows respect that they are willing to have a conversation. I've worked with some

managers who talk at you, which is fine, but for me, it then makes it hard for me to respect them. One manager wouldn't even talk to me or say 'hello'.

At all the clubs where I have scored the majority of my goals, Wealdstone, Heybridge, Carshalton, the one thing in common is that I had a very good relationship with the manager and there was mutual respect.

Your second spell at Wealdstone started with a loan from Sutton United – a little cameo where you scored 10 goals in 8 games (prior to re-signing the following season), did that spell refresh your appetite for the game?

I was really enjoying my time at Sutton prior to that loan move. I'd started the season well and scored goals to move us to the top of the league but then I hit a goal-less spell or 14 games. I was still playing well and assisting others but I just couldn't score. Paul Doswell (Sutton manager) then bought in Andy Forbes and I found myself on the bench. Although I was happy to play my part, Paul Doswell was honest with me and told me that he couldn't afford to keep me sitting on the bench so he wanted to send me out on loan for a month to get my goal scoring touch back and then bring me back in for the final run-in of the season to help us over the line if needed. Although I wasn't happy I understood his reasoning. That loan spell really did re-invigorate me and I loved coming back.

You cited wear and tear generally when you hung up your boots (the first time), yet you obviously missed something about the game enough that you made a comeback a year or so later. Any regrets about either of those decisions or your final retirement (to date)?

Towards the end of my time at AFC Wimbledon I suffered a torn quadricep in my right leg which

although healed enough to return to playing, never fully knitted back together. Since then thin strands of my quad have been slowly wearing away which has created a hole the size of a 50 pence piece in my muscle. So when I hung up my boots for the first time at 29 years old, it was on medical advice but also the fact I'd been playing non-league since I was 16 and I was tired of it.

When I returned after 18 months out I did so because I missed it. It's a big shock to the system going from playing and training 3 times a week to doing absolutely nothing. I don't regret the decision to retire at that point or to return playing - I enjoyed my last stint at Wealdstone and playing a very small part in keeping them in the Conference South. Personally, I think I should have stayed for another season instead of going to Kingstonian but hindsight is a wonderful thing.

What do you think when someone says Wealdstone FC or mentions the fans?

I think nothing but great memories. I feel very fortunate and proud to have played for the Club and played in front of the fans for so many years. The fans are definitely the most loyal and passionate I have played in front of. I've seen some players not able to handle it and crumble and I've seen others thrive on it. I loved it! Lots of things changed during my four spells, the ground, the kit, the players, the songs but one thing was always constant, Gordon Bartlett!

I'm disappointed that I didn't win more trophies or that I didn't break George Duck's goal scoring record so that my name was forever in folklore, but I'm proud of what I achieved at the club and honoured that I played there for so many years.

Finally, have you finished the wine yet?

Forget the money - that was the best goal bonus I ever had!